Theater/The Boys in the Band

Bold, but bland

"... All the zinger lines and vulgarity of the original Crowley script are there, but some of the color, unfortunately, is sadly missing ..."

"The Boys in the Band" is a play about alcoholism, making ends meet, a failing romance, a lost marriage, jealousy, being Jewish, prostitution, and, among other things, homosexuality.

And, because it is in part about homosexuality, "The Boys in the Band" is the most controversial of the new plays which have been produced in Columbia.

Stylistically, the play is a most conventional piece of theatre. There is a beginning, a middle, and an ending. There are distinctive characters and believable complications for what appears to be drawing room comedy.

Technically, however, the play borrows heavily from the absurdist technique of staging a psycho-drama with the audience serving as voyeurs instead of eager participants.

"The Boys in the Band" is a bitch-comedy, a play full of desperate attempts to communicate and screams of horror and hate and disgust.

What begins as a well-planned birthday party for a close friend becomes a hunting ground with the prey having to scamper to hold onto its sense of reality.

A group of "sad old queens" are going to gather to have a little birthday party for one of the fellows. Their gaiety is threatened when an old friend of the host -- a married heterosexual -- suddenly calls and invites himself over. His appearance is able to bring about a need for each of the "boys" to reexamine himself. The appearance of the heterosexual isn't the only catalyst working to turn the party into a "no exit" hell. Each character is presented as an individual. Each has his own problem, his own fears. As is many times the case at parties, tempers flare, feelings are hurt, people are offended.

Michael is the host for the party and the center of the play, desperately trying to cope with his homosexuality, trying to excuse himself by blaming "it" on his parents or claiming he was "so drunk I didn't know what I was doing."

He tries boldly to laugh at his excuses, but they are something he needs. He has decided that the party must become a bloodletting experience; yet he also seems to be fighting this inevitability since he knows the hell it causes.

Michael gets expert support from the other characters, though. Larry and Hank, for instance, are having a quarrel because Larry has been unfaithful to Hank who is trying to divorce his wife and keep his job as math teacher. And Harold is a freakish looking fag who has to make himself up for hours and get stoned before he'll ever appear on the streets. And Emory isn't too bright, and Bernard is black.

And the audience is asked to judge these characters as if they were human beings and not just a bunch of three-, or four-, or five-letter words. Their humanity, their frailty, their souls leave the audience no other criteria for judging them.

Mart Crowley's 1968 drama was one of the earliest attempts to try to show America what it means to be young and homosexual, persecuted by a misunderstanding majority.

It was very successful on the New York stage in spite of its controversial theme and its frankness. It also received moderate commercial success as a film which featured the original Broadway cast.

Thankfully, the Workshop Theater has decided to stay as faithful as possible to Crowley's original. All the zinger lines and vulgarity of the original script are there, but some of the color, unfortunately, is sadly missing.

The play is supposed to report the actual happenings over a couple of hours at the party; but, it is also a comic entertainment full of a sophisticated style of comedy of the "Thin Man" variety and it is also a clever mixture of the screwball antics of the Marx Brothers. Much of this element is missing from the Workshop's production. Much of the explosive quality is absent from the dialogue and a lot of action is too stagy for this production to work properly. The production suffers from a badly needed quickening of pace. The director simple allows most of the action to happen too slowly to arouse any underlying terror in the overall situation. This suspense was crucial to the success of the film version and would have added some joyfulness to an otherwise dull performance.

Fortunately, some of the actors are doing the best they can to put drive into the production. The whole show belongs to Robert Alan Smith who plays Emory. Emory brings most of the humor to the play when he arrives. Emory is a stereotyped picture of a homosexual interior decorator--very effeminate, the "swishy" type in the Playboy cartoons. He has come for a night of fun, bringing Harold a young "midnight cowboy" as a birthday present.

Emory is an innocent. He has decided for a long time that as long as he's stuck with living and is homosexual... what the hell.

At the same time he has a sense of joy and movement that his friends do not share. Emory is the type of role that is like many parts played by Marilyn Monroe -- the innocent who doesn't know his own worth.

Smith handles the role with great ease. He has a flamboyant comedy style which brings some life to the production.

Adrian Elder and Jim Thigpen as Donald and Larry also offer good performances. Elder's Donald is like a rock of strength for Michael and Emory. He is a young, handsome man who has accepted his homosexuality as being a natural part of his life. Elder is quite good, bringing a touch of sanity to the entire scene.

Thigpen is also successful with his role as Larry. Larry is an artist who is living with a math teacher. But he can't control his desires -- whether for his lover or another man or a woman. Thigpen portrays Larry as a leering man, almost insensitive to Hank's pain in their love relationship, but also as a man who is able to admit that he will try to make their love last. Thigpen and Gerald McKibben as Hank bring a freshness and sincerity to their scenes which do much to aid the production.

In the crucial role of Michael, however, Johnny DeHart can't hold the play together which, basically, is Michael's function. DeHart is responsible, partly, with slowing the play down, missing a lot of the comedy and the effect.

Director Ben E. Quick's stodginess is greatly responsible for dampening what is nevertheless an enjoyable production of Crowley's drama.

The Workshop's production is too bland to be the exciting, biting piece of theater that Crowley intended. Most of the social impact is still in the production, but its great comedy is poorly staged.

michael smith

cola

Upcoming events of interest in the Columbia area

Concerts

CHICAGO will jazz-rock on Thursday, April 27, at 8 p.m. in Carolina Coliseum. The two-hour, no-warm-up-band show has reserve seats for $4, $5, and $6. Another concert, same tour, same bunch is set Saturday, April 29, at 8 p.m. at Charloote Coliseum. Tickets cost the same.

NEIL DIAMOND will be in concert Saturday, May 7, at 8 p.m. at Carolina Coliseum. Reserve seats are $4, $5 and $6.

THE CARPENTERS have shows Thursday, April 27, at Spartanburg Memorial Auditorium. Performances at 6:30 and 9:30 p.m. and tickets are $4.50, $5.50 and $6.50. The sibling superstars will play Atlant's Municipal Auditorium Saturday, April 29, at 9 p.m. Tickets cost the same.

WESC GOSPEL CONCERT, for you hymnal holder, is planned Sunday, May 7, at 1:30 p.m. at Greenville Memorial Auditorium. The Imperials, The Blackwood Brothers, Rosie Rozell and the Searchers, The Travelers, Inspiration, Dixie Echoes and the Kingsmen will give you that old time religion for $3, $3.50 and $4.50 plus 25c seat tax.

B.J. THOMAS will croon Tuesday, June 13, at 8 p.m. in Atlanta Municipal Auditorium. Tickets are $4, $5 and $6.

JETRO TULL will perform Friday, April 28, at 8 p.m. in the University of Georgia Coliseum in Athen. The Tull concert for April 27 in Atlanta Municipal Auditorium has already been sold out.

ENGLEBERT HUMPERDINCK has performances at 6 and 9:30 p.m. May 20 at Atlanta Municipal Auditorium. Tickets are $4, $5, $6 and $8.

DAVID CASSIDY, teen-age hearthrob, waisl Sunday, April 30, at 4 p.m. at Charlotte Coliseum. Tickets are $4, $5 and $6.

ELAINE BONAZZI, nationally-known mezzo-soprano will be soloist with the Oratorio Singers May 6 at 8:15 p.m. in Charlotte's Ovens Auditorium. She will render Mozart's Grand Mass in C Minor.

A BLUEGRASS FESTIVAL in the indoor-outdoor wonder of Varnville, S.C., will be held Friday, Saturday and Sunday; May 5, 6, and 7. A band contest is set for 6 p.m. Friday and the pickin and sangin begins at 10 a.m. Saturday and Sunday. The show includes Bill Monroe, the Lewis Family, Jim and Jessie and the Osborne Brothers perform Saturday only. Ticket information is available from Roy Martin, 105 Lakeview Drive, Chester, S.C. 29706.

A COUNTRY SHOW with George Jones and the Jones Boys, Tammy Wynette, Patsy Sledd and Harold Morrison is set Friday, May 5, at 8 p.m. at Charleston Municipal Auditorium. Tickets are $3, $4 and $5.

COLUMBIA CHORAL SOCIETY will be in concert Monday, May 1, at Trinity Episcopal Church. Performances will be "Requiem" by Dourefle and David McK. Williams' "Hymn to the Immortals."

ROD STEWART, will bring his fantastic rock 'n roll show to Charlotte's Memorial Stadium Saturday, April 29. Along with Steaart and the Faces will be **FLEETWOOD MAC**, John Baldry, Free, Malo and Savoy Brown. The gig starts at 5 p.m., and 30,000 seats are available. Tickets are $4, $5 and $6.

Cinema

CONCERT FOR BANGLA DESH -- George Harrison, Bob Dylan, Leon Russell, Ringo Starr, Eric Clapton, Badfinger, Joe Ed Davis, Billy Preston et. al. recreate for film their August '71 concert to raise money for Bangla Desh refugees. The "indoor Woodstock" has been highly praised. Jefferson Square, 1801 Main Street, 765-2361.

THE FRENCH CONNECTION -- Gene Hackman and Roy Schreiber give fine performances in William Friedkin's frantically-paced story of a big-time dope bust. High realisim and tingling editing raise this above the usual run-of-the-mill melodramata. Hackman gives a flawless performance as Popeye Doyle. Winner of five Academy Awards. Miracle Theatre, 1228 Main Street, 256-1950.

ONE IS A LONELY NUMBER -- Trish van Devere plays a young woman who is trying to escape her married life. Another "T.R. Baskin" which has received poor notices. Fox, 1607 Main Street, 765-2361.

THE LAST PICTURE SHOW -- Tomothy Bottoms, Jeff Brigdes, Cloris Leachman, Ellen Burstyn, Cybil Sheppard and Sam Johnson give excellent performances in Peter Bogdanovich's gritty picture of escaping from a smalltown hell. Superior footage here. Plaza III, 1323 Main Street, 765-2361.

SHAFT -- Richard Roundtree plays super detective in this tough film about the Harlem underworld. Director Gordon Parks keeps the film moving at a quick pace. Fine location photography and score by Isaac Hayes. Carolina, 1223 Main Street, 765-2361.

COOL BREEZE -- All Black cast performs well in this retelling of the early '50's "Asphalt Jungle." Director Barry Pollack holds things together quite well in his first film attempt. Playing through 15 May at Atlantic I Theatre, 3220 Two Notch Road, 787-1225.

SEXUAL CUSTOMS IN SCANDANAVIA-SPORTING HOUSE -- Learn how the Swedes do it in this latest of socially redeeming works from the country that showed us why they are all so curious.

SPREAD EAGLES-BACK SEAT CABBY -- Mise-en-scene production stifles this search for pleasure in our troubled times. Starting May 5 at Atlantic II, 3220 Two Notch Road, 787-1225.

THE HOT ROCK -- Robert Redford, George Segal, and Zero Mostel madly romp through Peter Yates' fast-moving crime caper. Movie follows a gang of jewel theives through a comic series of bummers. Music by Quincy Jones. Richland Mall, 782-2228.

THE GODFATHER -- Marlon Brando, Al Pacino, James Caan, Robert Duvall and Richard Conte add class and fine polish to Francis Ford Cappola's realistic account of Mario Puzo's best-seller. See "Osceola" review. Palmetto Theatre, 1417 Main Street, 254-5800.

THE MAGIC CHRISTIAN -- Peter Serllera, Ringo Starr, Lawrence Harvey and Raquel Welch cavort through this film adaptation of Terry Southern's novel about Guy Green, a man who enjoys "making it hot for people." LATE SHOW ONLY Apr. 28 & 29 Palmetto Theatre.

FRIGHT -- Sex and Sadism featuring Susan George ("Straw Dogs" as a babysitter beset by hoimcidal maniacs again.

FROGS -- Ray Milland, Judy Pace. Yesterday the pond and pretty soon the Miracle Theatre. This AIP-horror-ecology flick is packing them in in NYC.

LITTLE FAUSS AND BIG HALSY -- Robert Redford, Michael J. Pollard. On the trail with two rambling heroes searching for America. Music by Johhny Cash and some fine racing thrills. LATE SHOW ONLY April 29. Miracle.

BOB & CAROL & TED & ALICE -- Natilie Wood, Robert Culp, Elliott Gould and Dyan Cannon are very funny and ridiculous as white-liberals looking for kicks in this tale of sex and wife-swapping in suburbia. Good acting and satiric punches help make this enjoyable watching. LATE SHOW ONLY May 6. Miracle Theatre, 1228 Main Street, 256-1950.

Specials

DA VINCI SKETCHES, reproduced from the artist's notebook, will be on display at the USC University Museum at Sumter and Pendleton streets through May 7. Hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays and 1-5 p.m. Sundays. Free admission.

DISNEY ON PARADE will have ten shows to never-never land Tuesday, April 25 through Sunday, April 30, at Greenville Memorial Auditorium. Reserve seats go for $2.50, $4, $5 and $5.50 plus a 25c seat tax. Tickets are $1 cheaper for the under-12 set on the first shows, Tuesday through Friday: 7:30 p.m. shows Tuesday-Thursday; 4 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. Friday; 10:30 a.m., 2:30 and 7:30 p.m. Saturday; and 2 and 6 p.m. Sunday. Wiggle your ears.

SPRING ART AUCTION, an annual affair pandering to rich artist and feeding poor ones, will be held Monday, May 1, at 8 p.m. in USC Capstone House. 50 artists, none students, are expected to offer. Art, Art. Get your arf. Right here folks.

USC INTRA-SQUAD game will be tackled Saturday, April 29, at Carolina Stadium. Y'all come and pray.

"THE WONDERFUL O", a musical fantasy performed by Carolina Repertory Company will be staged Friday, April 28, at 8 p.m. and Sunday, April 30, at 3 p.m. in Ovens Auditorium in Charlotte. The play is based on a James Thurber story.

SPIRO T. AGNEW, the vice president, will speak at the dedication of the Strom Thurmond Student Center at Baptist College of Charleston May 3 at 11 a.m. Middle America is invited.

JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR will be brought back to Charleston Municipal Auditorium on Monday, May 8, for performances at 7 p.m. and 10 p.m. The show is billed as the "original concert presentation from the cast album" and tickets are $4, $5 and $6.

BLITHE SPIRIT, a farce-comedy by Noel Coward on witty goblins, will be presented by Newberry College Theatre at the college Thursday, May 11 through Saturday, May 13.

RIVERWIND, a romantic musical by John Jennings, will gushingly climax the season for Town Theater, May 19-27.

MY FAIR LADY will be presented by Sumter Little Theater Tuesday, April 25 through Saturday April 29. Curtains at 8:15 p.m.

THE BOYS IN THE BAND continues through May 3 at the Workshop Theater. See Mike Smith's review on page 16.

THE FANTASTICKS plays Friday and Saturday, April 28 and 29, at the Orphan's Mother Dinner Theater in Charleston. Eat buffet 7 to 8:30 p.m. and pay $8. Catch the show only at 9 p.m. and you pay $4. Off-Broadway's longest running hit (10 years).

JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR, the authorized version by The National Company, plays at 6 and 9 p.m. Friday and Saturday, April 28 and 29, at Symphony Hall at Atlanta's Memorial Arts Center.

Albums

EAT A PEACH, a double album the The Allman Brothers Band, is fine listening, and surely one of the best albums of the year. Yet all this is tempered by the recuring thought that the Band will never be able to make an albu like this again, now that Duane is dead. The question now, is, will the boys be able to develop a Duane-less sound as exciting and memorable as that contained in "Eat A Peach." It should be interesting.

KEITH EMERSON WITH THE NICE, another two-record volume, is a welcome release, a chance to get a look at the organist before he joined Lake and Palmer and became more commercially accessible.

SOMETHING-ANYTHING is the latest album by Todd Rundgren, without a doubt the most talented utility infielder in the music business. Rundgren leans slightly in the direction of opo and becomes overbearingly cute at times; yet one of his most refreshing and most attractive qualities is his sense of humor. In fact, the major surprises of the album are his purely humorous songs.

AMERICA, by America, of all people, has a mysterious sound to it enhanced by Dewey Bunnell (the one whose voice sound like Neil Young) on six string acoustic guitar, Dan Peek on twelve string guitar, while Gerry Beckley is on another six string. Banal lyrics such as "the heat was hot" aren't prevelant enough to detract seriously from an injoyable album.

LOOSE, with Crazy Horse, is more an accurate reflection of the group than was their guest-star-studded first album, and therin lies the problem. The lyrics will win no awards, and, ultimately, the album is a bit of a disappointment. Still, Crazy Horse has done good music before and will likely do it again. Until then the group is marking time, but it can be time well spent if you work at it al little.

INTO THE PURPLE VALLEY is Ry Cooder's second solo album, a trip through our parent's Great Depression by an excellent performer who seems destined to become one of the most important musicans of the seventies. Cooder, of course, will never be called a good singer in the traditional sense, but he can be seen as a vocalist with a very authentic early blues style. The predominant setting of the album is the '30s and Cooder slips through migration, hits on rant blues, touches F.D.R. in Trinidad, goes into religion, farming, taxes, and sorrow. If you've only yeard Ry Cooder's almost scholarly-perfect mandolin and slide guitar work for the Stones, Crazy Horse, Little Feat and David Blue, you should hear him alone. If everything he merely touches turns to musical gold, think about what that means for an album of his own. Fine job.

New and recommended

Magazines

FEAR & LOATHING IN -- Hunter S. Thompson's personal vision of how the Democrats pick their candidate has become necessary reading in "Rolling Stone" magazine. Thompson, well-known for his book about the Hell's Angels and his writings on homemade weapons, throws humor, whimsey, and insight into each article, producing a view of elections that Theodore White can only suggest. A must for people who care about this year's elections. And especially for those who don't.

New Paperbacks

THE OTHER -- Actor Thomas Tyron has written a damned good story of a troubled child, filling his work with some of the best spine chills in some time. Tryon's work transcends the level of slick fiction, presenting itself as a rival to James' "Turn of the Screw," only its more enjoyable than James' ponderous prose.

THE BELL JAR -- Sylvia Plath's honest and terrifying novel about a young, successful woman who wants to kill herself and become, ironically and sadly, a fact. A deep experience.

BURY MY HEART AT WOUNDED KNEE—Dee Brown's picture of white men's justice and the glory of the Indian nation is a searing indictment of America's treatment of the original "Americans."

Movies

THE LAST PICTURE SHOW -- See "Osceola" review

CONCERT FOR BANGLADESH -- Harrison and company and a good time for all as musicians become humanitarians for starving missions.

THE FRENCH CONNECTION —A tough picture and a realistic look at the New York City Police Department under the expert direction of William Friedkin.

THE GODFATHER -- See "Osceola" review

Television

PBS FILM ODYSSEY -- A great series of films which, though subtitled, is quite good TV viewing. This series has presented some of the "classics" of international cinema and will continue its run through mid-June. 10 p.m., Fridays, Channel 35.

COLUMBO -- Peter Falk's befuddled detective has produced more joys than any regular series on TV this season. A cross between Inspector Clousseau and Sherlock Holmes, Columbo stresses the emotional aspects of murder instead of violence. Good humor, experimental (for TV) photography, and expert casts. Every third Wednesday, Channel 10.

ALL IN THE FAMILY -- 50,000,000 Americans couldn't be wrong. Archie and Edith Bunker take us into the living room of the blue-collar worker and come up with some surprising truths. 8 p.m. Saturdays, Channel 19.

MARY TYLER MOORE SHOW -- Ms. Tyler, Harper, and Leachman deserve credit for some fine comic moments and for, at least, showing us that every unmarried TV actress doesn't have to be Doris Day. Good supporting cast can usually save even the worst scripts. 8:30 p.m. Saturday, Channel 19.

THE DICK CAVETT SHOW -- If you dig late night jabber, this is the best place for it. Cavett's guests usually produce enough good conversation without having to be insulted by an ignorant host. Plenty of good humor and usually more informative than the leading competition. 11:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, Channel 25.